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Get the latest on the coronavirus' impact on the conference and NCAA hoops tournaments.

KEITH SRAKOCIC AP

LOCAL
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WHO declares virus crisis a pandemic, pushes for action

BY JAMEY KEATEN, MARIA CHENG AND JOHN LEICESTER
Associated Press

GENEVA

Expressing alarm both about mounting infections and inadequate government responses, the World Health Organization declared Wednesday that the global coronavirus crisis is now a pandemic but added that it's not too late for countries to act.

By reversing course and using the charged word "pandemic" that it had previously shied away from, the U.N. health agency sought to shock lethargic countries into pulling out all the stops.

"We have called every day for countries to take urgent and aggressive action. We have rung the alarm bell loud and clear," said Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO chief.

"All countries can still change the course of this pandemic. If countries detect, test, treat, isolate, trace and mobilize their people in the response," he said. "We are deeply concerned by the alarming levels of spread and severity and by the alarming levels of inaction."

The WHO said Iran and Italy are the new front lines of the battle against the virus that started in China.

"They're suffering, but I guarantee you other countries will be in that situation soon," said Dr. Mike Ryan, the WHO's emergencies chief.

He added that the agency thought long and hard about labeling the crisis a pandemic – meaning a new virus causing sustained outbreaks in multiple regions of the world.

The risk of employing the term, Ryan said, is "if people use it as an excuse to give up."

But the likely benefits are "potentially of galvanizing the world to fight."

Underscoring the mounting challenge: Italy's cases soared again, to 12,462 infections and 827 deaths – both numbers second only to China's.

Italy weighed imposing even tighter restrictions on daily life and announced billions in financial relief Wednesday to cushion economic shocks from the coronavirus, its latest efforts to adjust to the fast-evolving crisis that silenced the usually bustling heart of the Catholic faith, St. Peter's Square.

Italy's premier is urging people not to hoard food, saying

SEE PANDEMIC, 2A

SHELLY YANG syang@kcstar.com

A dispenser of hand sanitizer stands at the ready near the court Wednesday at Sprint Center during practice for the Big 12 tournament. The NCAA announced Wednesday that their national tournament would go on but would be played without fans present.

NCAA, Big 12 close tourneys to fans amid coronavirus concerns

BY BLAIR KERKHOFF
bkerkhoff@kcstar.com

In an extraordinary response to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, the doors are closed to fans for the NCAA Tournament, organization president Mark Emmert announced Wednesday.

The Big 12 Tournament in Kansas City is following suit, barring spectators from attending games in Kansas City starting Thursday, though fans were allowed to attend Wednesday night's games at Sprint Center.

"The NCAA continues to assess the impact of COVID-19 in consultation with public health officials and our COVID-19 advisory panel. Based on their advice and my discussions with the NCAA Board of Governors, I have made the decision to conduct our upcoming championships, including the NCAA Division I men's and women's basketball tournaments, with only essential staff and limited family attendance," Emmert said.

It's the first time in the NCAA basketball tournament's history that games will be played without spectators, and it makes March Madness the largest sporting event in the United States to be be affected by the virus.

Minutes before Emmert's announcement, the NCAA released a statement that said "... we recommend against

SEE TOURNAMENTS, 3A

Two Johnson County properties searched in missing woman case

BY ROBERT A. CRONKLETON AND KATIE BERNARD
bcronkleton@kcstar.com
cbernard@kcstar.com

Law enforcement agencies from across Johnson County searched two properties Wednesday morning in an ongoing investigation of a 51-year-old Prairie Village woman's disappearance, police said.

Prairie Village police announced that officers served two search warrants about 7 a.m. related to the disappearance of Angela Green, who police said was last seen on June 19, 2019, in the 7600 block of Tomahawk Road in Prairie Village.

Angela Green

She was reported missing about 8 months later, on Feb. 18, and police consider her an endangered person.

One search warrant was served at a home in the 7600 block of Tomahawk Road, in the area where Green was last seen. Police were seen setting up a tent behind a house on Tomahawk Road Wednesday morning.

Police also searched a property in the 1400 block of North Woodland Street in Olathe. The two locations are about 13 miles, or about a 20 minute drive, from each other.

At the Olathe property, boats and a trailer labeled Water Rescue Recovery Unit were seen pulling out of the fenced-in parking lot of an granite, marble and stone countertop business. There is a lake or pond behind the business, according to a satellite view from Google Maps.

Green was described as an Asian woman, about 5 feet 9 inches tall, weighing about 116 pounds, with brown hair and brown eyes.

Prairie Village police were being assisted by the Johnson County Crime Lab, the Johnson County Medical Examiner's Office and the Johnson County District Attorney's Office, as well as police from Olathe, Overland and Leawood.

Anyone with information about Green's whereabouts is asked to call the Prairie Village Police Department at 913-642-6868 or the TIPS Hotline at 816-474-8477.

Katie Bernard: (816)234-4167, @KatieJ_Bernard
Robert A. Cronkleton: 816-234-4261, @cronkb

Missouri suspends classes; KC officials warn against virus

BY CORTLYNN STARK
cstark@kcstar.com

The University of Missouri announced Wednesday it is suspending all classes through Sunday, and classes will only be offered remotely for several days after that, because of concern over the new coronavirus that is spreading across the U.S.

The news came the same afternoon it was announced the NCAA and Big 12 basketball tournaments will be played without fans, and hours after Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas and the city's top public

SEE REACTION, 2A

Note to readers

Starting March 14, we will launch a new weekend package with expanded newspapers on Fridays and Sundays and access to the Saturday edition exclusively online.

While we will no longer produce a printed newspaper on Saturday, we will continue to publish the strong independent local journalism you expect from The Kansas City Star online seven days a week.

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